THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20201

OCT 10 2003

Edward R. B. McCabe, M.D., Ph.D.
Chair, Secretary's Advisory Committee on Genetics, Health and Society
NIH Office of Biotechnology Activities
6705 Rockledge Drive, Suite 750
Bethesda, Maryland 20892

Dear Dr. McCabe:

I am writing to thank you and the Secretary's Advisory Committee on Genetics, Health, and Society (SACGHS) for your letter, advocating Federal legislation to prohibit discrimination in health insurance and employment on the basis of genetic information and endorsing Senate Bill S. 1053, the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2003. I wholeheartedly agree with SACGHS that such legislation is a national priority and that the Administration must continue to work expeditiously to ensure the enactment of a Federal law in this area this year.

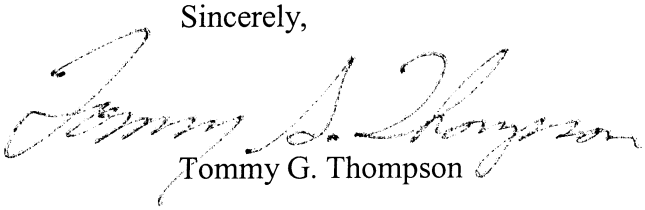
Public opinion polls have consistently shown that people are afraid that their genetic information could be misused. Indeed, as you pointed out, many people refuse genetic testing that might be medically beneficial or choose to pay for it out of pocket to avoid having the results become part of their medical record. If we are to realize the benefits from the knowledge generated by the Human Genome Project and advances in genetics, people must be assured that their genetic information is safe from misuse. Comprehensive, uniform legal protections against the misuse of genetic information will go a long way in helping to ease public concerns.

The Administration has been concerned about this issue for some time. Early in his term, President Bush made clear his opposition to genetic discrimination by health insurers and employers when he asserted in a radio address to the Nation that "to deny employment or insurance to a healthy person based only on a predisposition violates our country's belief in equal treatment and individual merit." The President also made a commitment to work with Congress to pass a law that is fair, reasonable, and consistent with existing discrimination statutes.

S. 1053 represents an opportunity to achieve the President's goal. It is the culmination of a long and dedicated bipartisan effort to formulate effective legal protections against the misuse of genetic information by both health insurers and employers. The Administration worked assiduously to support the bill during its consideration by the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, and we will continue to work with Congress for its advancement by the full Senate and the House of Representatives.

SACGHS' valuable advice adds weight to the urgency of our efforts to ensure that strong protections against genetic discrimination are secured for every American. Please be assured that the President and I are committed to passage of this bill.

Sincerely,



Tommy G. Thompson